



Increasing Health Literacy and HIV Prevention to High-Risk Youth

Public Health Problem

According to the 2003 YRBS, 37 percent of Wisconsin's students in grades 9-12 had ever had sexual intercourse and 26 percent had had sexual intercourse within the past three months. Nine percent reported having had four or more sexual partners and 35 percent did not use a condom during their last sexual intercourse. Furthermore, as of June 30, 2004, there were 5,549 reported AIDS cases and 8,511 reported HIV cases in Wisconsin. Adolescents ages 13-19 accounted for 45 of the reported AIDS cases and 209 of the reported HIV cases.

Taking Action

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has utilized a variety of strategies to provide HIV prevention education to young people. These strategies consist of addressing the needs of high-risk youth, focusing on health literacy, involving the community and parents in prevention activities, and forming strong collaborations to address abstinence and sexual risk behaviors.

During 2003-2004, four groups of at-risk youth received focus: gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) youth; Native American youth; students attending alternative schools; and minority youth. A three-day peer education skills building event was attended by 70 GLBT youth and their advisors. Within the same time frame, a number of events were also held for the Native American community, including the HIV/AIDS and STI Youth conference, which was attended by 30 Native American youth and their adult advisors. Another training that focused on effective HIV-prevention instruction principles was provided to 15 alternative school staff. Training also was provided on two evidence-based HIV-prevention curricula to 67 staff from schools and minority community-based organizations.

Implications and Impact

The Wisconsin DPI has utilized these strategies to focus on high-risk youth ensuring that those youth most at risk for becoming infected with HIV receive accurate HIV-prevention education along with the skills needed to protect themselves. Targeting health literacy results in the effective use of resources by providing only those resources that are successfully designed for and understood by the intended audience. Promoting the involvement of the community and parents increases support for HIV-prevention education and also increases the number of sources from which young people will receive prevention messages. This type of collaboration effectively pools ideas and resources resulting in a more comprehensive approach to prevention.

Contact Information

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